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Homes, Horizons and Orbits: Welsh Dahl and the Aerial View

Richard Marggraf Turley

[They] flew through the night for what seemed like hours and hours until they came at last to a gigantic opening in the earth's surface, a sort of huge gaping hole in the ground, and . . . glided slowly round and round above this massive crater and then right down into it . . . Suddenly there was a brightness like sunlight below them.¹

First aeronautic, then abruptly chthonic, this whimsical fantasy of flight from Roald Dahl's valedictory children's book, *The Minpins* (1991), depicts Little Billy being guided by Swan into the underground refuge of a vast blue lake. At first sight, a touching portrayal of serene escape from childhood tormentors, the avian episode is disturbed by the language of ordnance, by the 'massive crater' and 'huge gaping hole' in the earth. The passage might not seem out of place in one of the adult flying stories Dahl wrote in the final years of the Second World War, based on his experiences as a fighter pilot with 80 Squadron. Indeed, troubled by images of night-time bombing raids, *The Minpins's* climactic scene could almost be describing an aerial perspective on such cities as those reduced to rubble by Bomber Command pilots in Dahl's story, 'Someone Like You' (1944) – cities where women and old men in shelters are as likely to be hit as enemy soldiers.² Recalled too, perhaps, in the image of the crater are the ruins of Bexley, Kent, to which Dahl and his family relocated from Llandaff in 1927. When Dahl returned to south-east England in 1941 after flying sorties in the skies of Greece and Syria, the young Pilot Officer

was greeted by scenes of bombed-out streets, just as he had predicted to his mother Sofie Magdalene before the outbreak of war. Fearing – rightly – that Bexley’s position along the flightpath to London would render it vulnerable, he had issued his mother with a stark warning: ‘Go to Tenby otherwise you’ll be bombed.’³ *Going Solo* (1986), the second of Dahl’s two creatively autobiographical volumes, is punctuated by the anxiety that his mother and sisters would fall victim to aerial bombardment or invasion, and Wales figures – and is complexly figured – in the book as a place of refuge, both from stray ordnance and psychological disequilibrium.

Also ghosting Little Billy’s crepuscular flight and descent towards an explosive ‘brightness like sunlight’ is a defining event in Dahl’s war. On 19 September 1940, his Gloster Gladiator Mk 1 biplane crashed in the Libyan desert, leaving him with burns, serious concussion, temporary blindness and spinal injuries. That Dahl survived the war at all was little short of a miracle. Having received no formal combat training, he was, as his 1991 obituary in *Flying* magazine put it, ‘plunked into the fray’.⁴ On his return to active duty after his accident, Dahl found himself with the remnants of his squadron pitting superannuated Gladiators – a fixed-wheel survivor of an earlier age, powered by a two-blade wooden propeller – against technologically advanced Messerschmitt Bf 109s. Then on 19 and 20 April 1941, 80 Squadron, with a handful of Mk 1 Hurricanes, fought the Battle of Athens against more than a hundred enemy planes.⁵ The loss of squadron members became a regular occurrence. Dahl’s letters to his mother during this terrifying period may talk of ‘fun’ and ‘looping the loop’, but his wartime correspondence continues the practice of his school-days in censoring information likely to cause distress. His more candid expectation, shared with other members of 80 Squadron during the Battle of Athens, was ‘I think we’re going to get killed.’⁶

So intense were these experiences that, as Dahl’s first biographer, Jeremy Treglown, points out, ‘[i]t was inevitable that Dahl’s later stories for children would often involve flight.’⁷ But whereas flight is traumatic in self-announcing ways in the fabling reconstructions of Dahl’s flying stories with their cast of traumatised aircrews, ghostly pilots, grieving mothers and carpet-bombed populations, we tend to read aerial drama in his fiction for children in very different terms as a joyous pursuit, as a vector towards refuge or transcendence. Two prominent recent commentators, Hugo Crago and Dahl’s most recent

biographer, Donald Sturrock, identify a post-concussive narrative of redemption in the children's books, in which the 'fear, anxiety and dread' that suffuse the wartime flying stories are recuperated in more whimsical or mystical representations of flight.⁸ The sky, Sturrock suggests, becomes an 'alternative world', a refuge from the 'cruelties of human behaviour', and stories such as *James and the Giant Peach* (1961) and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964) evoke the 'ecstasy of flying'.⁹ Similarly, for Crago, the flight of Little Billy and Swan in *The Minpins* resonates with a redemptive symbolism that transforms the 'great sense of loss and damage' in the early work into a 'vision of abundant life and beauty'.¹⁰ Sturrock's concept of post-concussive salvage valuably alerts us to curative modalities in Dahl's *oeuvre*, whose spiky, cynical, sometimes sadistic humour has elicited censure for its supposed 'unhealthy' effects on younger readers. I offer here an alternative, post-traumatic (rather than concussive) narrative, in which the author's war shocks, complicated by memories of Wales, are carried into the fiction for children. Whereas Sturrock and Crago configure depictions of fantastical flight as a working-through of the fighter pilot's experience of peril and extreme violence, I suggest that Dahl is trapped in cycles of repetition around an aetiology of unexorcised memories of combat. In other words, I am concerned with the layered forms in which traumatic events such as Dahl's flying accident and the Battle of Athens invade the children's stories.

Hollindale suggests that by making his 'life events' available to younger readers in *Boy: Tales of Childhood* (1984) and *Going Solo*, 'Dahl is placing his adult self within reach of children.'¹¹ I wish to explore this crucial insight within the explicit frame of trauma theory. What follows is in four sections. Starting with a key episode from *Boy* and moving forward (and backward) to the end of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, as well as to the astronomical escape velocities of *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* (1972), I develop an engagement with issues of belonging, recollection and orientation; with horizons, parabolas (and parables); and with aerial views (of ground, of home, of targets) in Dahl's life and work. What becomes apparent is that far from being exorcised or accommodated in fantasy settings, irreality and whimsy, the traumas associated by Dahl with war aviation are precisely *exercised* in the aerial geometries and unpowered parabolas of the Charlie books, as well as in his other well-loved children's stories. In many cases, key episodes recalled in the autobiographical volumes

and (further) fictionalised in the children's stories exist as what we might term 'traumatic assemblages': that is, doubled or compacted memories that bring into tense apposition memories from childhood and subsequent experiences in Greece and Syria. Elevated viewing and horizoning, relocation, mislocation and peripheral vision, together with complex psychological geographies that collapse Kent, Somerset, Glamorgan and the Western Desert, nuance the seemingly easily dichotomised universes of the children's fiction and the stories for adults, allowing us to appreciate the complex ways in which Dahl's imagination thrives on the opposing vectors of troubled homing and aerial escape.

1. Bedtime Stories

My point of departure is also Dahl's: the multiply defining episode from *Boy* in which the nine-year-old Roald reflects on his first exile from Wales and on the acts of homing and mental navigation required to return to that country. The vignette, written when Dahl was in his sixties, enacts narratives of rootedness and displacement through the recollection of night-time (re)orientation at St Peter's preparatory school in Weston-super-Mare, Somerset, in 1925. The young boarder had been moved to St Peter's from Llandaff Cathedral School by Sofie Magdalene, outraged by a brutal caning her son had received at the hands of his headmaster, Mr Coombes.¹² In *Boy*, Dahl paints a striking picture of homesickness on his first night away from Wales, which he sought to assuage by calculating the direction in which the family villa, Cumberland Lodge in Llandaff, lay:

The first miserable homesick night at St Peter's, when I curled up in bed and the lights were put out, I could think of nothing but our house at home and my mother and my sisters. Where were they? I asked myself. In which direction from where I was lying was Llandaff? I began to work it out and it wasn't difficult to do this because I had the Bristol Channel to help me.¹³

From his Weston dormitory, the adept schoolboy deploys the pilot's trick of using rivers and waterways to orient himself. Dahl later described the method in his flying story, 'They Shall Not Grow Old', in which a fighter pilot is sent to Beirut to find two French destroyers:

‘I flew over Tyre and Sidon and over the Damour River and then I flew inland over the Lebanon hills, because I intended to approach Beyrouth from the east.’¹⁴ Using the Bristol Channel (seen from his St Peter’s ‘cockpit’) much as his ‘flyer’ does the Damour River, Roald calibrates his position relative to Llandaff-over-the-horizon:

If I looked out of the dormitory window I could see the Channel itself, and the big city of Cardiff with Llandaff alongside it lay almost directly across the water but slightly to the north. Therefore, if I turned towards the window I would be facing home. I wriggled round in my bed and faced my home and my family.

From then on, during all the time I was at St Peter’s, I never went to sleep with my back to my family. Different beds in different dormitories required the working out of new directions, but the Bristol Channel was always my guide and I was always able to draw an imaginary line from my bed to our house over in Wales.¹⁵

Dahl’s dormitory calculations suggest precocious orientation skills. However, Dahl’s 1984 account of his boyish ‘pilotage’ in 1925 has been sifted through the author’s intervening experience as a fighter pilot, conditioned in particular by his *misorientation* over the Western Desert. Dahl, who had just received his wings, was ordered to take his Gladiator biplane (registration K7911) from RAF Fouka to the forward airfield at RAF Sidi Haneish on the Libyan Plateau, operated by 80 Squadron. The flight was estimated to take fifty minutes. As his logbook records, Dahl took off from Fouka at 18:15 with an hour or so of daylight left. As dusk fell, there was still no sign of the airbase. Running low on fuel, the light failing, Dahl – increasingly desperate now, realising a return to Fouka was out of the question – conned the horizon for sight of his squadron. There was no way home.

It was nearly dark now. I had to get down somehow or other. I chose a piece of ground that seemed to me to be as boulder-free as any and I made an approach. I came in as slowly as I dared, hanging on the prop, travelling just above my stalling speed of eighty miles an hour. My wheels touched down. I throttled back and prayed for a bit of luck.

I didn’t get it. My undercarriage hit a boulder and collapsed completely and the Gladiator buried its nose in the sand at what must have been about seventy-five miles an hour.¹⁶

Dahl's injuries required extensive surgery, including the reconstruction of his nose, which was pushed back into his skull on impact with the aircraft's metal reflector-sight. *Going Solo* records how a Harley Street plastic surgeon rebuilt Dahl's nose using Rudolph Valentino's as a template, a fantastical reconstruction that no doubt appealed to the author.¹⁷ Interviewed about his crash in *The Times* in 1983 on the eve of *Boy*'s publication, Dahl made an explicit link between his terrifying forced landing and subsequent writing career, asserting that his 'monumental bash on the head' had altered his personality, leaving him with a sudden need to write fiction.¹⁸

Sturrock recognises the importance of the Gladiator crash to Dahl's sense of himself as a writer, and argues that representations of flight in the children's stories may be seen as post-concussive 'epiphanies', as transcendent refuges from horror.¹⁹ I suggest that episodes of levitation in books such as *James and the Giant Peach*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* gesture more urgently at Dahl's need to re-enact or fantastically to 'reconstruct' – *out of trauma*, and in often emphatically *non*-transcendent, non-epiphanic forms – key events from his time in the Mediterranean theatre. Contemporary trauma theory acknowledges the disjunction between the original traumatic event and the victim's understanding of it. In the case of writers, as Roger Luckhurst clarifies, paraphrasing Geoffrey Hartman, the desire to grasp the meaning of such events gives rise to irrepressible refigurings of traumatic incidents, where figurative language constitutes 'a form of "perpetual troping" around a primary experience that can never be captured'.²⁰ Dahl's work exhibits precisely such 'perpetual troping'. Traumatic memories from his war years associated specifically with his career as fighter pilot, the bombing of loved ones and his own status as a killer (on which the flying stories meditate), together with the author's complexly signifying Welsh home as both refuge and site of childhood violence, stage troubling and compacted returns in his fiction for children.

Not all injuries sustained in the Libyan desert were physical. As a trainee pilot, Dahl found himself near the top of his class, and the crash was, as Sturrock points out, a 'humiliating start to a flying career that had promised great things'.²¹ The indignity appears to have been felt keenly: in *Going Solo*, Dahl disavows all blame for the episode, claiming the coordinates his Commanding Officer had given him were inaccurate: 'It was revealed at an inquiry into my crash held later

that the CO at Fouka had given me totally wrong information. Eighty Squadron had never been in the position I was sent to. They were fifty miles to the south.'²² The RAF's accident report makes no such admission, merely noting that 'Pilot Officer Dahl was ferrying an aircraft from No. 102 Maintenance Unit . . . but unfortunately not being used to flying aircraft over the desert he made . . . an unsuccessful forced landing.'²³ Aspects of the crash landing feature in no fewer than three of Dahl's adult flying stories, including his first published tale, 'A Piece of Cake', renamed 'Shot Down over Libya' on its US publication in the *Saturday Evening Post*.²⁴ The racy change of title appears to have been made by the newspaper's editors to boost readership; subsequently, however, Dahl promoted the idea that his plane had been downed by enemy fire rather than by faulty navigation. Four decades later in 1984, when alluding on the last page of *Boy* to a second volume of autobiographical material that would become *Going Solo*, Dahl is still lending currency to the myth:²⁵ 'I shot down some German planes and I got shot down myself, crashing in a burst of flames and crawling out and getting rescued by brave soldiers crawling on their bellies over the sand.'²⁶ In the introduction to her 1995 collection of essays, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Cathy Caruth suggests that the traumatic event cannot be grasped or assimilated 'fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it'.²⁷ The recirculation of traumatic material at the end of *Boy* suggests that both the crash and its likely cause (pilot disorientation) remained unexorcised in the author's mind.

In the same passage of *Boy* in which he discusses shooting down German planes, Dahl is eager to draw a clear distinction between events in the Western Desert and memorable incidents in his youth and schooldays at Llandaff, Weston and Bexley: 'But all that is another story. It has nothing to do with childhood or school or Gobstoppers . . . It is a different tale altogether.'²⁸ Despite this assertion, Dahl's memories of 'wriggl[ing] around' in his bed at St Peter's to face his Welsh home and his account of the forced landing in Libya are very much part of the same, entangled story. The account in *Boy* of young Roald's successful display of homing in his Weston dormitory attempts to repair the newly qualified Pilot Officer's defective horizoning over Libya (such temporal effects, or 'disjunction of time', are characteristic of trauma fiction).²⁹ Whereas Dahl in 1940 was unable to find his squadron's base – whether through bungling inexperience or a superior's misdirection

– his schoolboy self proves sufficiently resourceful to plot an accurate flight path to his childhood home from multiple coordinates (‘Different beds in different dormitories required the working out of new directions’).³⁰ The two events, one in Weston, one in the Western Desert, are mutually embedded (compacted, *impacted*) memories of horizioning and (self-)location. Dahl’s account of that first lights out at Weston is troubled by the failed orientation strategies of Dahl the Pilot Officer. The schoolboy’s triumphant act of orientation already ‘repeats’ – as it seeks, but *fails*, to grasp – Dahl-the-fighter-pilot’s traumatic disorientation in the desert, his inability to draw an imaginary line home.³¹

2. Skyhooks

‘Repetition is not simply the attempt to grasp that one has almost died but, more fundamentally and enigmatically, the very attempt to *claim one’s own survival*.’³² Dahl’s studied *sangfroid* when writing to Sofie Magdalene about his dog-fights over Greece in April 1941 should not disguise the fact that daily combat against the Nazi war machine, mounting losses and the likelihood of being killed took an inevitable toll. In a brief but memorable passage from *Going Solo*, Dahl recalls being unable to light a cigarette after flying a sortie because his hands were shaking too much.³³ In the modality of post-Freudian trauma theory pioneered in the 1990s by Cathy Caruth and Shoshana Felman, repetition is recognised as both a symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder and an attempt – always unfulfilled – by the traumatised subject to grasp the meaning of the original traumatic event. As Caruth suggests, such events become accessible only in the moment of their return, in their ‘repeated *possession*’ of the one who experiences them. To be traumatised, then, ‘is precisely to be possessed by an image or event’.³⁴ In *Trauma Fiction* (2004), Anne Whitehead adds, valuably, that such events act as haunting revenants. Writers tend to ‘narrativise’ this sense of haunting in fictional forms characterised by ‘repetition and indirection’.³⁵ The following two sections of this essay examine recursive effects – in the form of the return of images, motifs and rhetoric – in Dahl’s work to argue that aspects of the stories for children may be considered as complex responses to extreme violence. I wish to suggest, in other words, that these stories may be understood as combat fiction.

In their introduction to *Trauma and Romance in Contemporary British Literature* (2014), Susana Onega and Jean-Michel Ganteau argue that a writer's need to represent trauma exerts pressure on traditional 'transparent' modes of realism, which come to be seen as inadequate as ways of giving voice to the unspeakable:

This urgent and irrepressible need to represent trauma . . . has forced fiction to problematise the traditional conventions of transparent realism by moving toward the pole of non-fictional testimony, while simultaneously incorporating the most salient modal strategies of romance, and so paradoxically moving towards the contrary pole of unabated fictionality and fantasy.³⁶

Such compulsive desire for representation is brokered, then, through narratives that exhibit a shift towards nonfictional 'testimony' while simultaneously making use of key strategies of romance. While Dahl, who has received surprisingly little attention from literary theorists, does not feature in the essays curated by Onega and Ganteau, in signal respects his work – encountered not as comprising distinct bodies of writing for children and adults, but rather as a series of (traumatically) related adjacencies – exhibits movement between the poles of testimony and romance. I do not simply mean that we can identify stylised verisimilitude in the flying stories, (fabling) testimony in the autobiographical volumes, and unabashed fantasy in the children's books. Rather, the terrors experienced by Dahl in the Mediterranean, his fears for the safety of his family in Bexley, and his vision of Wales, his country of birth, as a refuge from horror (which at the same time itself signifies as a traumatic site of institutional violence), seek representation through recursive themes, motifs and images associated with flight. The ghostly returns of this material in scenes of flight, I will argue, should not be considered redemptive or transcendent, but instead as markers of unassimilated trauma, as sites of worry. What follows is not only an attempt to 'diagnose' Dahl by identifying symptom clusters, or psychopathologies, in his writing, but also an interrogation of conventional distinctions between his adult flying stories and children's writing. Also at stake is the crucial issue of the extent to which an alertness to Dahl as a traumatised writer allows a more attuned appreciation of his relation to Wales.

James and the Giant Peach and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* are often regarded as escapist fantasies whose aerial *jouissance* offers ecstatic release from the world of overbearing, bullying adults and stultifying systems. At issue in each narrative, however, is a dilemma: *how to remain aloft*. Both books propose surreal solutions that involve unpowered or else impossibly powered flight, and both culminate in crash landings, albeit ones in which the protagonists receive the ‘bit of luck’ denied Dahl in the desert.³⁷ Tempting though it may be to regard James’s and Charlie’s successful deplanings as, in Sturrock’s and Crago’s terms, recuperative examples of disaster averted, and the peach, in Catherine Butler’s formulation, as figuring a ‘retreat from the cruelties and vicissitudes of the world’, trauma studies suggest that the traumatic condition allows no final assimilation of the original crisis, no definitive representation of its aporia.³⁸ That is to say, Dahl’s imaginative preoccupation with crash landings is not exorcised by James’s successful touch-down on the Empire State Building. Rather, his anxieties are recycled back into a stock of recursive images, ready for reassembly, as we shall see, in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. With their representations of precarious flight and perilous descent, both novels confront Dahl’s own near-death experience in the desert, figured through what Cathy Caruth terms a ‘double telling’, an ‘oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*’, in which the latter is bound up with the ‘unbearable nature of . . . survival’.³⁹ In Charlie’s case, the struggle with gravity will produce a new danger – that of not landing at all; in *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator*, the lift’s roof-splintering lift-off from Wonka’s chocolate factory takes the protagonist into orbit, straight into the Cold War and the space race, back-and-out into conflict between nations. Like all trauma victims, then, Dahl finds himself in a perpetual ‘crisis of representation’.⁴⁰ In the quotation at the head of this section, Caruth contends that repetition constitutes more than simply the attempt to take in the fact that one has almost died. ‘[M]ore fundamentally and enigmatically’, she notes, ‘it is the very attempt *to claim one’s own survival*’.⁴¹ As the various scenes of flight in Dahl’s fiction for children seem to register, survival is a claim that must be renewed.⁴²

It might seem fanciful to suggest that the deep traumas of Dahl’s war writing of the 1940s and 1950s are carried over into well-loved children’s fantasies. Consider, however, the apparently surreal scene in which the crew of the giant peach attempt to extricate themselves from a shark-infested sea. James (another resourceful schoolboy) concocts

a plan of levitation involving hundreds of yards of silk. Miss Spider demands to know what James intends to attach the silk to, prompting Centipede's droll remark: 'Skyhooks, I suppose.' Easily missed, Willy Wonka makes an identical quip at the beginning of *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* in response to Grandma Josephine's similarly incredulous inquiry into the lift's method of propulsion:

'What in the world keeps this crazy thing up in the air?' croaked Grandma Josephine . . .

'Skyhooks,' said Mr Wonka.

The giant peach, it transpires, is levitated by means of hundreds of tethered seagulls. The secret of Wonka's soaring glass elevator is never shared, but we may assume its power source is equally improbable. Such fantasies of impossible flight present themselves as quintessential whimsy, calculated to appeal to young readers. As cognate *re-presentations*, however, of Dahl's predicament as his fuel gauge fell – that is, as relational returns linked linguistically through Centipede's and Mr Wonka's invocation of 'skyhooks' – they function as a registration of a deeper anxiety about remaining airborne. Within the books' fantasy logic, *skyhooks* would appear to be magical fixed points in the sky from which heavy objects can be safely suspended. Dahl, however, probably encountered the term *skyhook* during his flying days as the nickname commonly used for the Airco DH.6, a trainer biplane used during the First World War by the Royal Flying Corps, which remained in service as late as the 1930s. The plane was almost impossible to stall or spin (hence the nickname – it stayed up), and could fly at speeds as low as 30mph – attributes that would probably have saved Dahl in the desert. *James and the Giant Peach* and *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* further frame both flying peach and lift in terms of Dahl's wartime experiences – specifically the trauma of forced landing, and Dahl's anxieties that his failure to follow training protocols might have caused it.

In one of the stranger episodes in the peach's transatlantic flight, James and the insect aeronauts encounter hordes of wispy Cloud-Men standing atop fleecy clouds, whose hostile response to the peach directly invokes Dahl's terrifying world of dog-fighting. Hailstones hurled by the Cloud-Men take on the qualities of 'bullets from a machine gun', which smash into peach flesh:

This evidently infuriated the Cloud-Men beyond belief. All at once, they spun around and grabbed great handfuls of hailstones and rushed to the edge of the cloud and started throwing them at the peach, shrieking with fury all the time.

‘Look out!’ cried James. ‘Quick! Lie down! Lie flat on the deck!’

... The hailstones came whizzing through the air like bullets from a machine-gun, and James could hear them smashing against the sides of the peach and burying themselves in the peach flesh with horrible squelching noises – *plop! plop! plop! plop!* And then *ping! ping! ping!* as they bounced off the poor Ladybird’s shell because she couldn’t lie as flat the others. And then *crack!* as one of them hit the Centipede right on the nose ...

‘Ow!’ he cried. ‘Ow! Stop! Stop! Stop!’⁴³

As well as injuring Centipede’s nose, the ghostly Cloud-Men – haunting revenants, in Whitehead’s terms – also pour quick-drying rainbow paint over him, causing him to exclaim in panic: ‘My eyelids won’t open! I can’t see.’ Calibrated from within the context of Caruth’s and Whitehead’s analysis of traumatic repetition, Centipede’s injuries are suggestive. As has already been discussed, Dahl’s nose required surgical reconstruction following his desert crash, and as a consequence of cranial swelling the author was unable to open his eyes for several weeks.⁴⁴ The encounter with the Cloud-Men, then, collapses – or assembles – two traumas, air combat over Greece in April 1941 (machine-gun bullets smashing into James’s ‘aircraft’) and Dahl’s forced landing in September 1940 (during which he sustained injuries mirroring the Centipede’s).

The crew wake to find the peach hanging over New York. Like Dahl over the desert, who had ‘to get down somehow’, they search for a means of safe descent.⁴⁵ At that moment, a passenger plane slices through the silk strings attaching the peach to the seagulls: ‘[T]he enormous peach, having nothing to hold it up in the air any longer, went tumbling down towards the earth like a lump of lead.’⁴⁶ Uncontrolled descent returns us to the traumatic territory of the Libyan desert:

James could see the skyscrapers rushing up to meet them at the most awful speed, and most of them had square flat tops, but the very tallest of them all had a top that tapered off into a long sharp point – like an enormous silver needle sticking up into the sky.

And it was precisely on to the top of this needle that the peach fell!
There was a squelch. The needle went in deep.⁴⁷

The peach's 'successful' crash landing on the spire of the Empire State Building might present itself as self-healing. (Jeremy Treglown is insightful in describing Dahl the story-teller as a healer manqué.)⁴⁸ But the unassimilability of the desert Libyan forced landing is suggested by the prominent imagery of medical needles, hinting at the months of pain and recuperation endured in hospital in late 1940 and early 1941 – hinting, that is, at other kinds of bedtime stories.

3. The Biggest Bomb

Dahl abhorred the practice of civilian bombing, and in a letter to *The Times* in 1983 referred to the 'ghastly RAF raid on Dresden'.⁴⁹ It may have been no more than good fortune that saved Dahl himself from being given a commission as a bomber pilot. On receiving their wings, Dahl's trainee group at RAF Habbaniya found itself 'divided up into fighter pilots or bomber pilots', with no reason given for the division.⁵⁰ Dahl's horror at the bombing of civilian populations is explored in his first novel, *Sometime Never*, begun in 1946, around the time he read John Hersey's *New Yorker* article on the atomic destruction of Hiroshima.⁵¹ When the novel appeared in the US in 1948, it was the first to imagine the nuclear bombing of a British city, and includes a shocking vignette of 'scorched and seared and half-melted' Londoners sitting upright in a double-decker bus:

all of them had had their hats blown off their heads so that they sat there bald-headed, scorch-skinned, grotesque, but very upright in their seats. Up in front, the black-faced driver was still sitting with his hands resting on the wheel, looking straight in front of him through the empty sockets of his eyes.⁵²

Dahl had also registered his revulsion at indiscriminate bombing in 'Someone Like You'. The short story engages sharply with the tactic of saturation bombing, and includes a distinctive 'twist'. Examining the *mutual* impact of such methods of warfare, Dahl presents an acute psychodynamic portrait of two carpet bombers:

‘You know,’ he said, ‘you know I keep thinking during a raid, when we are running over the target, just as we are going to release our bombs, I keep thinking to myself, shall I just jink a little; shall I swerve a fraction to one side, then my bombs will fall on someone else. I keep thinking, whom shall I make them fall on; whom shall I kill tonight.’⁵³

A sense of the arbitrariness with which he himself escaped becoming a bomber pilot seems to have preyed on Dahl’s mind. Perhaps he worried he had an innate propensity for such a role. His diary recounts the glee with which as a child he rigged up a Meccano ‘chariot’ on wires to carry soup cans filled with payloads of water across the Dahls’ two-acre Bexley garden. The intended targets were local women exercising their right to walk their dogs along a public footpath that traversed the bottom of the family’s grounds, and the young Roald scored a direct hit. ‘For days afterwards,’ he records, ‘I experienced the pleasant warm glow that comes to all of us when we have brought off a major triumph.’⁵⁴ The pressure of the realisation that he could easily have been assigned to drop bombs on inhabitants of towns and cities just like Bexley exerts itself at various times in his children’s stories, and occasions some striking switches of perspective. One example is the arrival of James’s magical peach above New York, which causes panic on the streets below. The formulaic imagery of aerial views, of beetle-like cars and microscopic people, is shockingly interrupted by the language of an air raid:

Far below them, in the City of New York, something like pandemonium was breaking out. A great round ball as big as a house had been sighted hovering high up in the sky over the very center of Manhattan, and the cry had gone up that it was an enormous bomb sent over by another country to blow the whole city to smithereens. Air-raid sirens began wailing in every section. All radio and television programmes were interrupted with announcements that the population must go down into their cellars immediately.⁵⁵

The scene is manifestly in dialogue with ‘Someone Like You’ – ‘narrated back’, as it were, at the flying story’s carpet bomber protagonists from the perspective of bombed civilians:

Faster and faster [the peach] fell. Down and down and down, racing closer and closer to the houses and streets below . . . And all the

way along Fifth Avenue and Madison Avenue, and along all the other streets in the City, people who had not yet reached the underground shelters looked up and saw it coming, and they stopped running and stood there staring in a sort of stupor at what they thought was the biggest bomb in all the world falling out of the sky on to their heads. A few women screamed. Others knelt down on the sidewalks and began praying aloud. Strong men turned to one another and said things like, 'I guess this is it, Joe,' and 'Good-bye, everybody, good-bye.' And for the next thirty seconds the whole City held its breath, waiting for the end to come.⁵⁶

Amid the whimsy of boot-wearing centipedes and talking silkworms, the passage sets up a tonal confusion. A traumatic singularity has formed in which burgeoning irreality and a psychodynamically veridical portrait of civilian populations caught in the open during an air raid are collapsed into the same time and space.

If the peach's descent condenses two images operating out of trauma – desert crash-landing and air raid (the latter itself condensing the act of being bombed and of being cast as the bomber), a near-identical traumatic assemblage occurs near the end of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Treglown suggests the intensity of Dahl's experiences in the skies of Greece made it 'inevitable' that the author's stories for children would 'often involve flight'.⁵⁷ Certainly, the aeronautical trajectories of Willy Wonka's lift seem to resonate suggestively with Dahl's time in 80 Squadron. The following passage, for instance, summons the distinctive sound of the Gloster Gladiator, known for the scream of the 'wind in the wires':

[T]he lift began flattening out again, but it seemed to be going faster than ever, and Charlie could hear the scream of the wind outside as it hurtled forward . . . and it twisted . . . and it turned . . . and it went up . . . and it went down . . . and . . .⁵⁸

But while the lift puts Dahl back in the cockpit of his plummeting Gladiator, it also threatens to become one of the four-engined heavy bombers Dahl narrowly escaped piloting. In the final scenes of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, Mr Wonka's glass elevator drops onto the Buckets' tiny cottage, smashing through the roof like the 4,000lb 'Satan' bombs that destroyed parts of London in the Blitz:

CRASH went the lift, right down through the roof of the house into the old people's bedroom. Showers of dust and broken tiles and bits of wood and cockroaches and spiders and bricks and cement went raining down on the three old ones who were lying in bed, and each of them thought that the end of the world was come. Grandma Georgina fainted, Grandma Josephine dropped her false teeth, Grandpa George put his head under the blanket, and Mr and Mrs Bucket came rushing in from the next room.

...

'Just look at our house!' cried poor Mr Bucket. 'It's in ruins!'⁵⁹

The fantasy destruction at the end of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* parallels actual bomb damage to the roof of the Dahls' Bexley house, when stray ordnance brought one of the Victorian ceilings crashing down around Dahl's mother and sisters.⁶⁰ Again, war trauma is carried into the children's fiction, resonating in complex ways with ideas of both homing and homecoming.

4. Escape Velocities

'Oh, look,' he cried, pointing down, 'there go the other children! They're returning home!'⁶¹

It is tempting to view the aerial virtuosity of the glass elevator (surely capable of outmanoeuvring the most skilfully piloted Messerschmitt Bf 109) as an embodiment of the 'glory of flight', and the aerobatic ending to *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* as a joyous, epiphanic conclusion to a story in which Wonka 'hands over his world to the young boy'.⁶² Yet Charlie's ballistic exit from the chocolate factory is not, I suggest, pitched towards freedom at all; nor is it (merely, or unproblematically) the prelude to taking possession of the keys to a new home. Rather, the grand inversion of gravity that catapults Charlie into uncertain space can be productively understood as an act of breaking with Roald's Welsh past.

'Corporal punishment', Peter Hollindale notes, often strikes readers of Dahl's creatively autobiographical writings as the 'dominant memory' of the author's school days; certainly, as Treglown and others point out, a large section of *Boy* is given over to recollections of

beatings.⁶³ The flogging episode with perhaps the most far-reaching consequences takes place in the rooms of Dahl's headmaster in Llandaff Cathedral School. Along with four other practical jokers, Dahl claims, he was caned for his part in placing a mouse in a jar of gobstoppers in the local sweet shop. With the shopkeeper supposedly in ghoulish attendance, the school friends were subjected to a sadistic beating. Movingly, and surely not coincidentally, when Dahl narrates his own punishment, the scene slips into, and resonates with, the discourse of downed fighter planes:

By the time the fourth stroke was delivered, my entire backside seemed to be going up in flames.

Far away in the distance, I heard Mr Coombes's voice saying, 'Now get out.'⁶⁴

Stationed here, I suggest, is yet another of the traumatic assemblages that form connected nodal points across Dahl's *oeuvre*, linking and collapsing memories as well as time and space. Discursively entangled in this passage are memories of the searing pain inflicted by both the cane and the heat from the exploding fuel tank of Dahl's Gloster Gladiator, which left a fiery wreck from which the semi-conscious pilot had to rouse himself to 'get out'.⁶⁵ Another node with which the scene in Mr Coombes's office is linked is located in 'A Piece of Cake', Dahl's fictionalised account of his crash. As the pilot in the story lies injured in the flaming wreckage, his inner voice tells him: 'The – plane – is – burning. Get – out – repeat – get – out – get – out.'⁶⁶ Llandaff and the Libyan desert are produced through a process of mutual prisms.

Mr Coombes's injunction that Dahl leave his room also resonates in the context of the young boy's relationship with Wales, which was strongly inflected by the family's Norwegian identity and cultural reference points. Born in Llandaff, Roald held British citizenship (unlike the rest of his family), but spoke Norwegian at home. Sofie Magdalene's strong accent marked her as an outsider all her life, and during the war the family was regarded with suspicion as 'alien nationals'.⁶⁷ Coombes's 'get out', then, may also be freighted for Dahl with a cultural agon that was certainly felt, and articulated, by his mother, whose attitudes towards Wales were transparently conflicted. The headmaster's assault on her son prompted her to move Roald not only from his Llandaff school, but also over the border. In Dahl's memory in *Boy* of

Sofie's enraged response (presumably translated from Norwegian) to the caning, she declares: 'I shall find you an *English* school this time.'⁶⁸ In September 1925, at the age of nine, Dahl was duly relocated to Weston, Somerset, where he became a boarder, effectively leaving Wales. Two years later, the entire family moved to Kent.

Although Dahl does not express any particular yearnings for Wales after his relocation, the country figures resonantly in his imagination as a place of detached refuge from war, with the Pembrokeshire sea-side town of Tenby, in particular, evoked in letters to his mother as a haven from both bombs and invasion.⁶⁹ In fact, Wales did not turn out to be as immune from violence as Dahl assumed. In addition to the damage inflicted on larger centres of population in the south, such as Cardiff, Swansea and Newport (each of which suffered its own 'Blitz'), targets in west Wales, including Haverfordwest, Pembroke Dock and Tenby itself, were also hit. The vulnerability of home, and of one's relation to home, features prominently in Dahl's work. It is the act of homecoming, as we have seen, that causes the destruction of the Buckets' cottage, and which casts Charlie as both triumphant aerial wizard and malevolent bombardier. Indeed, the elevator's glass construction, seemingly designed with elevated views over cities in mind, hints at the glass-bottomed 'blister' in which Second World War bomb-aimers lay. Charlie's homing instinct also takes us back to Roald's dormitory at St Peter's in Weston. Buried in Dahl's adult recollection of that first wretched night is his (intervening) wartime knowledge, discussed earlier in this essay, that bomber pilots navigated by rivers during blackouts. At some level, perhaps, resenting having been sent away from Wales owing to his Llandaff headmaster's act of violence, Dahl returns some of that violence in the form of a mental bombing run implied in the 'imaginary line' he draws between his new bed and his Welsh home. In the same way as Charlie, heir to Wonka's fabulous riches, destroys the traumatic site of his childhood destitution, Dahl, now a boarder at the prestigious St Peter's school (a feeder school for Repton), attacks the country that brutally expelled him, the land that told him to 'get out'. The suspicion that the elevator represents an explosive threat is voiced by the US President in *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* as the lift nears the USA Space Hotel: "'That's not a bed, you drivelling thickwit!" yelled the President. "Can't you understand it's a trick! It's a bomb. It's a bomb disguised as a bed! They're going to blow up our magnificent Space Hotel!"'⁷⁰

The chocolate factory is itself threatened by the elevator in similar terms, the lift's return trajectory again hybridised with the language of the bombing run. The Buckets – squeezed in and around the grandparents' bed – demand to know why Mr Wonka is taking the lift high above the chocolate factory, rather than landing beside it:

'Go down!' yelled Grandpa George.

'No, no!' Mr Wonka yelled back. 'We've got to go up!'

'But why?' they all shouted at once. 'Why up and not down?'

'Because the higher we are when we start coming down, the faster we'll all be going when we hit,' said Mr Wonka . . .

'When we hit *what?*' they cried.

'The factory, of course,' answered Mr Wonka . . . 'It's not easy to punch a hole in a roof as strong as that.'⁷¹

Like Charlie, who brought the lift smashing down through the roof of his parents' cottage, Mr Wonka turns bombardier, aiming his payload at industrial factories (here, his own), calculating speed and trajectory as carefully as the young Roald planned his own bombing run from Weston to Llandaff. The lift's psychic 'payload' is the grandparents' bed, symbol of the family seat – indeed, the bed is the traumatic object that connects the family drama playing out in the elevator to that staged in the homesick Roald's bed at St Peter's. (Just as the young Dahl draws an 'imaginary line' between St Peter's and Cumberland Lodge, so we can draw a line between his Weston bed and the bed carried by the glass elevator.) What is being delivered, or visited on, the chocolate factory – just as it has already been visited on the Buckets' home – is that paradigmatic site of exile, Roald's first dormitory bed.

As well as producing a violent Welsh (re)visitation, Dahl's traumatic dislocation in Weston contributes to imaginative energies that take the schoolboy, finally, all but beyond the pull of Wales, as Wonka's lift – continuing into orbit, into weightlessness – appears to perform a final dissociative act. Wonka reveals the ultimate aerial perspective, 'the countries and oceans of the Earth spread out below' like a map. But as we've seen, the escape velocity and upward trajectory take Charlie into Cold War anxieties. In the President's imagination, the lift – and Charlie himself – are configured as a guided missile. Thus flight in Dahl's fiction for children rarely displays (or seldom solely displays) ecstatic or redemptive characteristics; on the contrary, it is usually

accompanied by anxiety and unease. As Charlie observes: 'It was an eerie and frightening feeling to be standing on clear glass high up in the sky. It made you feel that you weren't standing on anything at all.'⁷² The children's stories do not 'redeem' or 'heal' Dahl's combat experience, but relive it, traumatically. No less than Dahl, Charlie and James are 'flyers', exiles, survivors of 'eerie and frightening' events, each with an irrepressible need to renew covenant with their survival.

Notes

- ¹ *The Minpins* (London: Penguin, 2008 [1991]), p. 43.
- ² The pilots describe their helplessness in the face of the fact that the vagaries of their flight path, or a touch of the ball of the foot on the rudder-bar, could easily 'throw the bombs on to a different house and on to other people', causing the bomb-aimers to 'miss getting the soldiers and get an old man in a shelter'; 'Someone Like You', *The Collected Short Stories of Roald Dahl* (London: Penguin, 1992), pp. 318, 319. Staring round at the people in the bar, one of the pilots remarks: 'I've killed more people than there are in this room hundreds of times. So have you . . . Same sort of people. Men and women and waiters. All drinking in a pub' (pp. 322–3).
- ³ Letter to Sofie Magdelene, written from Dar es Salaam, dated 19 March 1939; included in *Going Solo* (London: Puffin, 1988 [1986]), p. 29.
- ⁴ *Flying*, February 1991, pp. 29–30.
- ⁵ Dahl worked out that of the fifteen fellow trainees with whom he learned to fly in Nairobi in late 1939, thirteen were killed within two years of the war; see Dahl, *Going Solo*, p. 83.
- ⁶ Dahl, *Going Solo*, p. 154. As Peter Hollindale points out, the accident in the Western Desert may have saved Dahl's life, initially taking him out of action for seven months and ultimately leading to the author being invalided out of the RAF in June 1941. See 'And children swarmed to him like settlers. He became a land: the outrageous success of Roald Dahl', in *Popular Children's Literature in Britain*, ed. Julia Briggs, Dennis Butts and Matthew Orville Grenby (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 279.
- ⁷ Jeremy Treglown, *Roald Dahl: A Biography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), pp. 46–7.
- ⁸ Donald Sturrock, *Storyteller* (London: HarperPress, 2010), p. 197.
- ⁹ Sturrock, *Storyteller*, pp. 136, 154.
- ¹⁰ Hugo Crago, *Entranced By Story: Brain, Tale and Teller, from Infancy to Old Age* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 215.
- ¹¹ Hollindale, children swarmed to him like settlers', p. 279.
- ¹² See Sturrock, *Storyteller*, p. 49.

- 13 Roald Dahl, *Boy: Tales of Childhood* (London: Puffin, 1986 [1984]), pp. 89–90.
- 14 Dahl, *The Collected Short Stories*, p. 293.
- 15 Dahl, *Boy*, p. 90.
- 16 Dahl, *Going Solo*, p. 100.
- 17 Dahl, *Going Solo*, p. 113.
- 18 Interview with Peter Lennon, *The Times*, 22 December 1983, p. 8. Years after the accident, Dahl's writing space in his shed in the village of Great Missenden in Buckinghamshire was shaped by the physical accommodations he made for his spinal injuries.
- 19 Sturrock, *Storyteller*, p. 136.
- 20 Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 7.
- 21 Sturrock, *Storyteller*, p. 124.
- 22 Dahl, *Going Solo*, pp. 101, 103.
- 23 Sturrock, *Storyteller*, p. 126.
- 24 The episode is also dramatised in 'Only This' and 'Lucky Break', and appears in Dahl's first story for younger readers, *The Gremlins* (1943), in which the protagonist Gus crash-lands his plane and afterwards recuperates, like Dahl, in a 'small, dark' hospital room.
- 25 When *Going Solo* appeared in 1986, Dahl finally clarified the situation: 'There seems . . . to be an implication that I was shot down by enemy action . . . The fact is that my crash had nothing whatsoever to do with enemy action. I was not shot down' (Dahl, *Going Solo*, p. 97).
- 26 Dahl, *Boy*, p. 176.
- 27 Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 4.
- 28 Dahl, *Boy*, p. 176.
- 29 See Michelle Balaev, *The Nature of Trauma in American Novels* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2012), p. xvi.
- 30 Dahl, *Boy*, p. 90.
- 31 One of Dahl's most accomplished flying stories, 'Beware of the Dog', turns on wrong coordinates. The downed protagonist spends much of the tale believing he is in hospital in Brighton, when in fact he is being held in northern France.
- 32 Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 58.
- 33 Dahl, *Going Solo*, pp. 152–3.
- 34 Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, pp. 4–5.
- 35 Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 3.
- 36 Susana Onega and Jean-Michel Ganteau, 'Traumatic realism and romance in contemporary British narrative', in *Trauma and Romance in Contemporary British Literature*, ed. Susana Onega and Jean-Michel Ganteau (Routledge: London, 2014), p. 4.

- ³⁷ Dahl, *Going Solo*, p. 100.
- ³⁸ Ann Alston and Catherine Butler, 'Introduction', in *Roald Dahl* (New Casebooks), ed. Ann Alston and Catherine Butler (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 4.
- ³⁹ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 7. Dahl's account of his forced landing is recounted in a chapter of *Going Solo* entitled 'Survival'.
- ⁴⁰ Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, p. 65.
- ⁴¹ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 58.
- ⁴² Actor Kenneth Haigh, Dahl's Great Missenden neighbour and friend, referred to Roald as 'Big Daddy Survivor himself'; Treglown, *Roald Dahl*, p. 203.
- ⁴³ Roald Dahl, *James and the Giant Peach* (London: Puffin, 2001 [1961]), pp. 113–14.
- ⁴⁴ Sturrock, *Storyteller*, pp. 128–30.
- ⁴⁵ Dahl, *Going Solo*, p. 100.
- ⁴⁶ Dahl, *James and the Giant Peach*, pp. 136–7.
- ⁴⁷ Dahl, *James and the Giant Peach*, p. 138.
- ⁴⁸ Treglown, *Roald Dahl*, p. 125.
- ⁴⁹ *The Times*, 19 September 1983, p. 15. Dahl claimed he could not open fire on civilians. In *Going Solo*, he states he would have been unable, if required, to give the command to shoot fleeing German citizens in Dar es Salaam (p. 64). Like the other Hurricane pilots in his squadron, Dahl reports, he did not open fire during the first pass of the ground strafe on the Vichy French planes after they spotted young French women drinking wine with the pilots next to the wings (*Going Solo*, p. 193). The squadron's 'chivalry' cost them damage to their planes on their second run, when the Vichy ground crews were prepared for the attack. The incident is dramatised in 'They Shall Not Grow Old', *The Collected Short Stories*, pp. 285–99.
- ⁵⁰ Dahl, *Going Solo*, p. 93.
- ⁵¹ Sturrock, *Storyteller*, p. 254.
- ⁵² Roald Dahl, *Sometime Never* (London: Collins, 1949), p. 158.
- ⁵³ Dahl, *The Collected Short Stories*, p. 318. Outside the WW2 flying stories, Dahl's anti-bombing sentiments make rare undisguised appearances. The most explicit of these occurs during an exchange between the BFG and Sophie about humankind's propensity for violence against itself: "[H]uman beans is squishing *each other* all the time," the BFG said. "They is shootling guns and going up in aeroplanes to drop their bombs on each other's heads every week" (Roald Dahl, *The BFG* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982), p. 100).
- ⁵⁴ Sturrock covers the incident in *Storyteller*, p. 59. The incident is perhaps recalled in Dahl's poem 'The Cow', from *Dirty Beasts* (1983). The flying cow, Daisy, drops a cowpat on a man standing beneath her: 'She dived, and using all her power / She got to sixty miles an hour. / "Bombs gone," she cried. "Take that!" she said, / And dropped a cowpat on his head' (Roald Dahl, *Dirty Beasts* (London: Penguin, 2001 [1983]), p. 22).

- 55 Dahl, *James and the Giant Peach*, p. 133.
- 56 Dahl, *James and the Giant Peach*, pp. 137–8.
- 57 Treglown, *Roald Dahl*, p. 46.
- 58 Roald Dahl, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (London: Puffin, 2001 [1964]), p. 154. *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* includes a comparable passage: ‘Everybody clutched hold of everybody else and as the great machine gathered speed, the rushing whooshing sound of the wind outside grew louder and louder and shriller and shriller until it became a piercing shriek and you had to yell to make yourself heard’ (Roald Dahl, *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* (London: Penguin, 2001 [1972]), p. 12). The description recalls Dahl’s memory of first climbing into a Tiger Moth with the engine running, putting his head into the slipstream and getting ‘a rush of wind full in the face’ (Dahl, *Going Solo*, p. 85).
- 59 Dahl, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, p. 187
- 60 See Sturrock, *Storyteller*, p. 159. Dahl’s family survived, and moved to Quainton, forty miles north-west of London.
- 61 Dahl, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, p. 180.
- 62 Sturrock, *Storyteller*, p. 156.
- 63 Hollindale, ‘And children swarmed to him like settlers’, p. 278. See also Treglown, *Roald Dahl*, pp. 19–23.
- 64 Dahl, *Boy*, p. 50.
- 65 Dahl, *Going Solo*, p. 101.
- 66 Dahl, *The Collected Short Stories*, p. 224.
- 67 Sturrock, *Storyteller*, p. 160.
- 68 Dahl, *Boy*, p. 51.
- 69 In 1939, Dahl exhorted his mother to move from Bexley back to Wales: ‘It’s absolute madness to stay anywhere in the East of England now. You’ll have parachute troops landing on the lawn if you don’t look out’ (*Going Solo*, p. 76).
- 70 Dahl, *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator*, pp. 25–6.
- 71 Dahl, *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator*, pp. 12–13, 14.
- 72 Dahl, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, p. 180.

